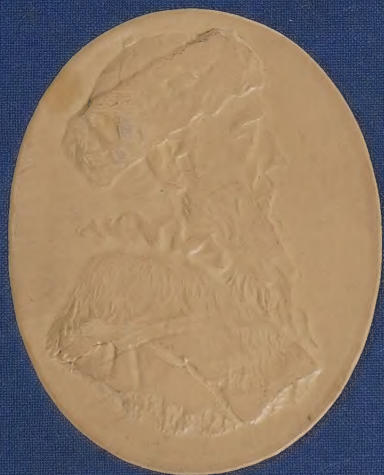


SONNETS FROM  
THE PORTUGUESE



ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING



CAMEO CLASSICS









SONNETS  
FROM  
THE PORTUGUESE

## CAMEO CLASSICS

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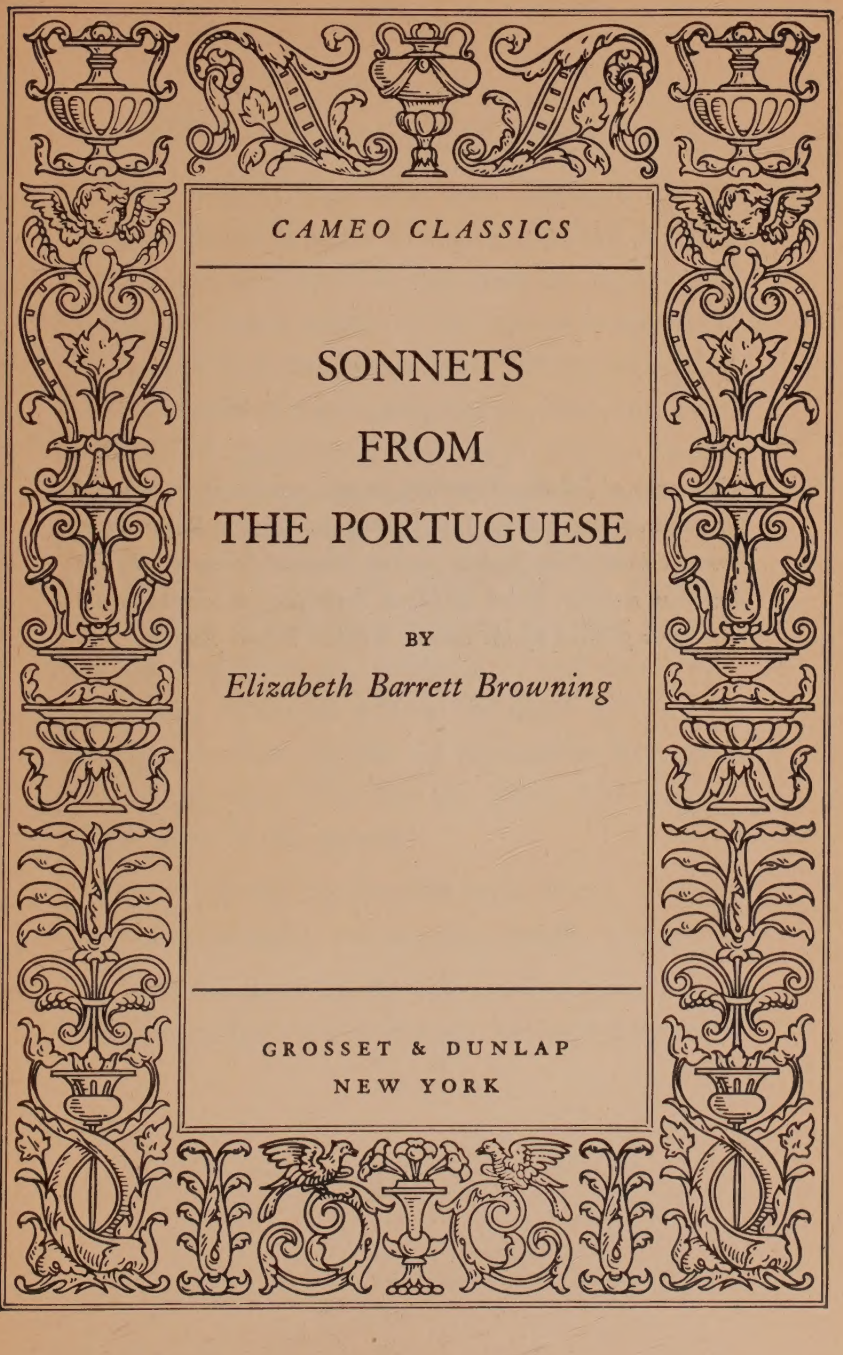
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CAMEO CLASSICS

SONNETS  
FROM  
THE PORTUGUESE

BY

*Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

GROSSET & DUNLAP  
NEW YORK

*The cameo of Johann Gutenberg on the cover is from a medal produced by Anton Scharff, of Vienna, for the late Robert Hoe, from the head of the famous portrait statue of Gutenberg by the American sculptor, Ralph Goddard. Permission to use the medal was granted by the owner, William Edwin Rudge.*

## A NOTE

When Robert Browning met Elizabeth Barrett Moulton-Barrett for the first time, she had been for many years an invalid in her home at 50 Wimpole Street. The exact nature of her illness is uncertain. Mr. G. K. Chesterton says of her: 'She was an invalid, and an invalid of a somewhat unique kind, and living beyond all question under very unique circumstances'; and he speaks later of 'hysteria' and 'neurosis.' But whatever her illness may have been it was real enough to her, and dangerously so at times. 'The picture of helpless indolence' she calls herself; 'sublimely helpless and impotent'; 'I had done *living* I thought'; 'Was ever life so like death before? My face was so close against the tombstones, that there seemed no room even for the tears.' The thought comes often in the sonnets:

Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink  
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sing . . .  
I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange  
My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with thee!

Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighbourhood . . .

She speaks always of her life before the meeting with  
Browning as one of sadness:

The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,  
Those of my own life . . .

Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love.

For frequent tears have run  
The colours from my life . . .

Yet her childhood, passed on her father's country estate, was a happy one, until at the age of fifteen the illness which was to haunt her life began. At this time too while saddling her pony she injured herself in some way which was thought to have affected her spine, and this increased the delicacy of her health. She was a precocious child, who read Greek and wrote verses from very early days. A few years after the accident her mother died, and there remained to Elizabeth eight younger brothers, two sisters—and her father. Like the father of the Brontës, the father of the Barretts is one of the enigmas of literary history;

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he was a factor of overwhelming importance in that strange family. Chesterton says 'at last . . . she knew to all intents and purposes that she had grown up in the house of a madman.'

To his children he was almost unbelievably despotic; and, especially, any suggestion of the possibility of marriage for any one of them seems to have driven him to fury. 'Everyone you see . . . all my brothers . . . constrained *bodily* into submission . . . by that worst and most dishonouring of necessities, the necessity of *living*, everyone of them all, except myself, being dependent in money matters on the inflexible will.' But though she realised that her father was 'a peculiar person', it is clear that for many years Elizabeth was genuinely devoted to him. Two crises in her life, before their final parting, affected her feelings towards him. The first was the death of her brother Edward—'my brother whom I loved so . . . the dearest of friends and brothers in one . . . better than us all, and kindest and noblest and dearest to *me*, beyond comparison, any comparison . . .' After their mother died, the family had moved to Sidmouth,

and then to London, where Elizabeth became very ill. 'They sent me down you know to Torquay—Dr Chambers saying that I could not live a winter in London. The worst—what people call the worst—was apprehended for me at that time. So I was sent down with my sister to my aunt there—and he, my brother whom I loved so, was sent too, to take us there and return.' But when the time came for his return Elizabeth was so distressed that her father with great reluctance allowed him to remain, though he 'considered it to be *very wrong in me to exact such a thing.*' Then, two years later, Edward was drowned at sea! it nearly killed Elizabeth. 'For three days we waited—and I hoped while I could—oh—that awful agony of three days! . . . I, who could not speak or shed a tear, but lay for weeks and months half conscious, half unconscious, with a wandering mind . . . The spring of life . . . seemed to break within me *then.*' Her sensitive imagination accused her with 'acid thoughts.' 'For see how it was, and how, "not with my hand but heart," I was the cause or occasion of that misery—and though not with the intention of my

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heart but with its weakness, yet the *occasion*, any way!’ This tragedy in her life brought her father very near to her: ‘When . . . I lost what I loved best in the world beyond comparison and rivalry . . . far better than himself as he knew . . . when I lost *that*, . . . I felt that he stood the nearest to me on the closed grave . . . or by the unclosing sea . . . he was generous and forbearing in that hour of bitter trial, and never reproached me as he might have done and as my own soul has not spared.’

In the Dedication ‘T O M Y F A T H E R’ prefixed to the first edition of her P O E M S she says: ‘You, who have shared with me in things bitter and sweet, softening or enhancing them, every day . . . may accept from me the inscription of these volumes, the exponents of a few years of an existence which has been sustained and comforted by you as well as given . . . It is my fancy thus . . . to satisfy my heart while I sanctify my ambition, by associating with the great pursuit of my life its tenderest and holiest affection.’

This is not the language of one oppressed beyond endurance, and at this time her father can hardly have

been, to Elizabeth at least, the monster he has been represented; and it is worth remembering, perhaps, that this pathetic Dedication was reprinted in all editions of her Poems till her death—long after she had left him, never to be forgiven.

In 1841 she returned to Wimpole Street, to lead there for many years her invalid life, shut in her room, with 'Flush, my dog' her chief companion and 'loving friend.'

But of *thee* it shall be said,  
This dog watched beside a bed  
Day and night unwearied,  
Watched within a curtained room  
Where no sunbeam broke the gloom  
Round the sick and dreary.

In the summer she would go out sometimes in a chair or carriage, or even, very rarely, for a walk. 'I was out walking again to-day, and . . . I walked up all these stairs with my own feet on returning. I sat down on the stairs two or three times . . . and I was not carried, as usual—see how vain-glorious I am.'



But in the winters she could hardly leave her room: 'We all get used to the thought of a tomb, and I was buried, that was the whole.' The second crisis in her relations with her father occurred after she and Browning had met, and must have made easier for her the decision to escape.

His character was 'becoming gloomier and stranger as time went on' \* and though in July 1845 he was 'discussing the question' of sending Elizabeth abroad for the winter—'though . . . I suppose, *I* should not be much consulted'—yet in September, when her doctor urged the necessity of it, he deliberately made her going impossible. 'Words have been said that I cannot easily forget, nor remember without pain . . . I told him that my prospects of health seemed to me to depend on taking this step . . . I feel aggrieved of course and wounded.' Later she writes: 'I had believed Papa to have loved me more than he obviously does'; and again: 'If he had let me I should have loved him . . . Now it is too late . . .'

This weakening of her affection for her father must

\* G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning*.

have influenced her later conduct profoundly, yet even before this time the greater influence of Browning had altered her whole outlook. They knew nothing of each other beyond their published works, but a common admiration served as introduction. 'I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett'—so begins one of the most fascinating correspondences in English literature.

This was in January 1845, and by May after many letters and much hesitation on her part, Browning had overcome her 'blind dislike of seeing strangers' and was admitted to see her for the first time. Two days later she received a letter—the only one in the long series to be destroyed—which must have amounted to a declaration of love. Her answer is preserved: 'You do not know what pain you give me in speaking so wildly. You have said some intemperate things . . . fancies,—which you will *forget at once*, and *for ever*, having said at all . . . if there should be one word of answer attempted to this; or of reference; *I must not . . . I will not see you again.*' But, on this condition, he might call on Tuesday.

He did call, and they continued to meet secretly once a week, until in September she wrote: 'You have touched me more profoundly than I thought even *you* could have touched me . . . Henceforward I am yours for everything but to do you harm.' For a full year more their meetings went on; both writing almost daily, and sometimes twice a day; Browning urging her to marry him and fly to Italy, Elizabeth consenting but hesitant. 'I will do what you please and as you please to have it done. But there is time for considering.' During this time she must have been writing the Sonnets, but there is no mention of them in her letters. It was not lack of courage in either that made it impossible to face her father, but the absolute certainty of his refusal. 'He would rather see me dead at his foot . . . We should be separated, you see, from *that moment*.'

A secret elopement was the only possibility. '*Elopement*—(But, dearest, nobody will use such a word surely to the *event*.)' At last the time came when they must decide at once, or wait another year—Elizabeth's health would not allow a winter journey. They

were married on Saturday, September 12th, 1846, and she returned to Wimpole Street after the service: a week later, with Flush and her maid Wilson, they sailed for France. She never saw her father again; when, years later, they came back to England, the letters she had written him were sent to her unopened: Wimpole Street was closed against her. From Paris they went to Pisa, and there for the first time she showed the Sonnets to her husband. There is, of course, no Portuguese original for them. Browning admired especially her poem 'Catarina to Camoens,' and had called her his 'little Portuguese.' It has been suggested that this may have been the origin of the purposely misleading title, which was not used until the Sonnets were published in 1850. Referring to their publication Browning is reported to have said: 'I dared not keep to myself the finest Sonnets written in any language since Shakespeare's.'



SONNETS  
FROM  
THE PORTUGUESE

# I

I thought once how Theocritus had sung  
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished for years,  
Who each one in a gracious hand appears  
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:  
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,  
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,  
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,  
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung  
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,  
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move  
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair,  
And a voice said in mastery while I strove, . .  
'Guess now who holds thee?'—'Death,' I said. But,  
    there,  
The silver answer rang . . 'Not Death, but Love.'



## II

But only three in all God's universe  
Have heard this word thou hast said,—Himself,  
    beside  
Thee speaking, and me listening! and replied  
One of us . . . *that* was God, . . . and laid the curse  
So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce  
My sight from seeing thee,—that if I had died,  
The deathweights, placed there, would have signified  
Less absolute exclusion. 'Nay' is worse  
From God than from all others, O my friend!  
Men could not part us with their worldly jars,  
Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;  
Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars,—  
And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,  
We should but vow the faster for the stars.





### III

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!  
Unlike our uses and our destinies.  
Our ministering two angels look surprise  
On one another, as they strike athwart  
Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art  
A guest for queens to social pageantries,  
With gages from a hundred brighter eyes  
Than tears even can make mine, to ply \* thy part  
Of chief musician. What hast *thou* to do  
With looking from the lattice-lights at me,  
A poor, tired, wandering singer, . . singing through  
The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree?  
The chrism is on thine head,—on mine, the dew,—  
And Death must dig the level where these agree.

\* Altered to *play* in later editions.



## I V

Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor,  
Most gracious singer of high poems! where  
The dancers will break footing, from the care  
Of watching up thy pregnant lips for more.  
And dost thou lift this house's latch too poor  
For hand of thine? and canst thou think and bear  
To let thy music drop here unaware  
In folds of golden fulness at my door?  
Look up and see the casement broken in,  
The bats and owlets builders in the roof!  
My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.  
Hush, call no echo up in further proof  
Of desolation! there's a voice within  
That weeps . . as thou must sing . . alone, aloof.





## V

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,  
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,  
And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn  
The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see  
What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,  
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn  
Through the ashen greyness. If thy foot in scorn  
Could tread them out to darkness utterly,  
It might be well perhaps. But if instead  
Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow  
The grey dust up, . . . those laurels on thine head,  
O my belov'd, will not shield thee so,  
That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred  
The hair beneath. Stand further off then! go.



## VI

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand  
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore  
Alone upon the threshold of my door  
Of individual life, I shall command  
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand  
Serenely in the sunshine as before,  
Without the sense of that which I forbore, . .  
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land  
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine  
With pulses that beat double. What I do  
And what I dream include thee, as the wine  
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue  
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,  
And sees within my eyes, the tears of two.



## VII

The face of all the world is changed, I think,  
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul  
Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole  
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink  
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,  
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole  
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole  
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,  
And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee anear.  
The names of country, heaven, are changed away  
For where thou art or shalt be, there or here;  
And this . . this lute and song . . loved yesterday,  
(The singing angels know) are only dear,  
Because thy name moves right in what they say.





## VIII

What can I give thee back, O liberal  
And princely giver, who hast brought the gold  
And purple of thine heart, unstained, untold,  
And laid them on the outside of the wall  
For such as I to take or leave withal,  
In unexpected largesse? am I cold,  
Ungrateful, that for these most manifold  
High gifts, I render nothing back at all?  
Not so; not cold,—but very poor instead.  
Ask God who knows. For frequent tears have run  
The colours from my life, and left so dead  
And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done  
To give the same as pillow to thy head.  
Go farther! let it serve to trample on.



## I X

Can it be right to give what I can give?  
To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears  
As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years  
Re-sighing on my lips renunciative  
Through those infrequent smiles which fail to live  
For all thy adjurations? O my fears,  
That this can scarce be right! We are not peers,  
So to be lovers; and I own, and grieve,  
That givers of such gifts as mine are, must  
Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas!  
I will not soil thy purple with my dust,  
Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass,  
Nor give thee any love . . . which were unjust.  
Beloved, I only love thee! let it pass.



## X

Yet, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed  
And worthy of acceptation. Fire is bright,  
Let temple burn, or flax. An equal light  
Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or weed.  
And love is fire; and when I say at need  
*I love thee . . mark! . . I love thee! . .* in thy sight  
I stand transfigured, glorified aright,  
With conscience of the new rays that proceed  
Out of my face toward thine. There's nothing low  
In love, when love the lowest: meanest creatures  
Who love God, God accepts while loving so.  
And what I *feel*, across the inferior features  
Of what I *am*, doth flash itself, and show  
How that great work of Love enhances Nature's.





## X I

And therefore if to love can be desert,  
I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale  
As these you see, and trembling knees that fail  
To bear the burden of a heavy heart,—  
This weary minstrel-life that once was girt  
To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail  
To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale  
A melancholy music,—why advert  
To these things? O Beloved, it is plain  
I am not of thy worth nor for thy place!  
And yet, because I love thee, I obtain  
From that same love this vindicating grace,  
To live on still in love, and yet in vain, . .  
To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face.



## XII

Indeed this very love which is my boast,  
And which, when rising up from breast to brow,  
Doth crown me with a ruby large enow  
To draw men's eyes and prove the inner cost, . .  
This love even, all my worth, to the uttermost,  
I should not love withal, unless that thou  
Hadst set me an example, shown me how,  
When first thine earnest eyes with mine were crossed,  
And love called love. And thus, I cannot speak  
Of love even, as a good thing of my own.  
Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint and weak,  
And placed it by thee on a golden throne,—  
And that I love (O soul, we must be meek!)  
Is by thee only, whom I love alone.



### XIII

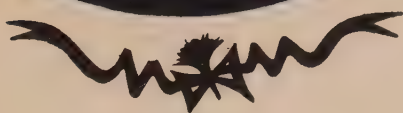
And wilt thou have me fashion into speech  
The love I bear thee, finding words enough,  
And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,  
Between our faces, to cast light on each?—  
I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach  
My hand to hold my spirit so far off  
From myself . . me . . that I should bring thee proof  
In words, of love hid in me out of reach.  
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood  
Commend my woman-love to thy belief,—  
Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,  
And rend the garment of my life, in brief,  
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,  
Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief.





## XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought  
Except for love's sake only. Do not say  
'I love her for her smile . . her look . . her way  
Of speaking gently, . . for a trick of thought  
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought  
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day'—  
For these things in themselves, Belovèd, may  
Be changed, or change for thee,—and love, so  
    wrought,  
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for  
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry,—  
A creature might forget to weep, who bore  
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!  
But love me for love's sake, that evermore  
Thou may'st love on, through love's eternity.



## X V

Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear  
Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;  
For we two look two ways, and cannot shine  
With the same sunlight on our brow and hair.  
On me thou lookest, with no doubting care,  
As on a bee shut in a crystalline,—  
Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's divine,  
And to spread wing and fly in the outer air  
Were most impossible failure, if I strove  
To fail so. But I look on thee . . on thee . .  
Beholding, besides love, the end of love,  
Hearing oblivion beyond memory!  
As one who sits and gazes from above,  
Over the rivers to the bitter sea.



## XVI

And yet, because thou overcomest so,  
Because thou art more noble and like a king,  
Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling  
Thy purple round me, till my heart shall grow  
Too close against thine heart, henceforth to know  
How it shook when alone. Why, conquering  
May prove as lordly and complete a thing  
In lifting upward, as in crushing low!  
And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword  
To one who lifts him from the bloody earth,—  
Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,  
Here ends my strife. If *thou* invite me forth,  
I rise above abasement at the word.  
Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.





## X V I I

My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes  
God set between His After and Before,  
And strike up and strike off the general roar  
Of the rushing worlds, a melody that floats  
In a serene air purely. Antidotes  
Of medicated music, answering for  
Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst pour  
From thence into their ears. God's will devotes  
Thine to such ends, and mine to wait on thine.  
How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most use?  
A hope, to sing by gladly? . . or a fine  
Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse?  
A shade, in which to sing . . . of palm or pine?  
A grave, on which to rest from singing? . . Choose,



## XVIII

I never gave a lock of hair away  
To a man, Dearest, except this to thee,  
Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully  
I ring out to the full brown length and say  
‘Take it.’ My day of youth went yesterday;  
My hair no longer bounds to my foot’s glee,  
Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,  
As girls do, any more. It only may  
Now shade on two pale cheeks, the mark of tears,  
Taught drooping from the head that hangs aside  
Through sorrow’s trick. I thought the funeral-shears  
Would take this first, but Love is justified,—  
Take it thou, . . finding pure, from all those years,  
The kiss my mother left here when she died.



## X I X

The soul's Rialto hath its merchandise;  
I barter curl for curl upon that mart,  
And from my poet's forehead to my heart,  
Receive this lock which outweighs argosies,—  
As purply black, as erst, to Pindar's eyes,  
The dim purpureal tresses gloomed athwart  
The nine white Muse-brows. For this counterpart, . .  
Thy bay-crown's shade, Belovèd, I surmise,  
Still lingers on thy curl, it is so black!  
Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing breath,  
I tie the shadow safe from gliding back,  
And lay the gift where nothing hindereth,  
Here on my heart, as on thy brow, to lack  
No natural heat till mine grows cold in death.





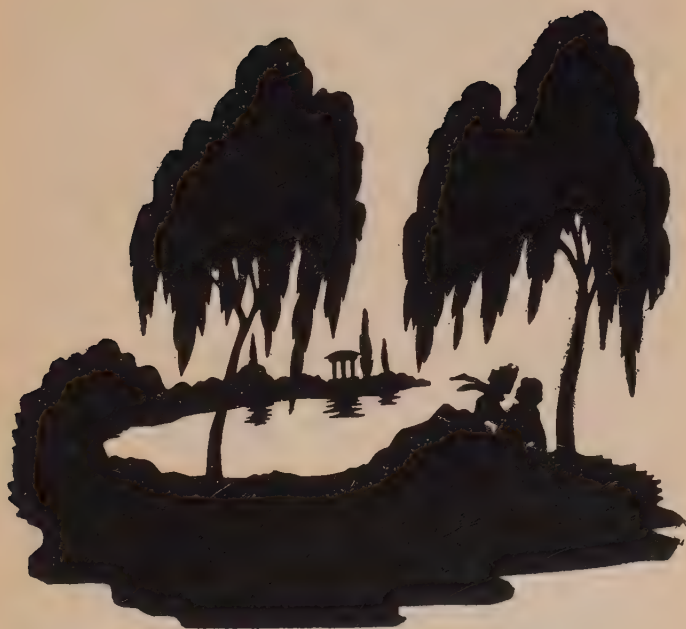
## XX

Beloved, my Beloved, when I think  
That thou wast in the world a year ago,  
What time I sat alone here in the snow  
And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink  
No moment at thy voice, . . but, link by link,  
Went counting all my chains, as if that so  
They never could fall off at any blow  
Struck by thy possible hand . . . . why, thus I drink  
Of life's great cup of wonder! Wonderful,  
Never to feel thee thrill the day or night  
With personal act or speech,—nor ever cull  
Some prescience of thee with the blossoms white  
Thou sawest growing! Atheists are as dull,  
Who cannot guess God's presence out of sight.



## XXI

Say over again, and yet once over again,  
That thou dost love me. Though the word repeated  
Should seem 'a cuckoo-song,' as thou dost treat it.  
Remember never to the hill or plain,  
Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-strain,  
Comes the fresh Spring in all her green completed.  
Beloved, I, amid the darkness greeted  
By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's pain  
Cry . . 'Speak once more . . thou lovest!' Who can fear  
Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll—  
Too many flowers, though each shall crown the year?  
Say thou dost love me, love me, love me—toll  
The silver iterance!—only minding, Dear,  
To love me also in silence, with thy soul.



## XXII

When our two souls stand up erect and strong,  
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,  
Until the lengthening wings break into fire  
At either curvèd point,—what bitter wrong  
Can the earth do to us, that we should not long  
Be here contented? Think. In mounting higher,  
The angels would press on us, and aspire  
To drop some golden orb of perfect song  
Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay  
Rather on earth, Belovèd,—where the unfit  
Contrarious moods of men recoil away  
And isolate pure spirits, and permit  
A place to stand and love in for a day,  
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.





### XXIII

Is it indeed so? If I lay here dead,  
Would'st thou miss any life in losing mine?  
And would the sun for thee more coldly shine,  
Because of grave-damps falling round my head?  
I marvelled, my Belovèd, when I read  
Thy thought so in the letter. I am thine—  
But . . so much to thee? Can I pour thy wine  
While my hands tremble? Then my soul, instead  
Of dreams of death, resumes life's lower range.  
Then, love me, Love! look on me . . breathe on me!  
As brighter ladies do not count it strange,  
For love, to give up acres and degree,  
I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange  
My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with thee!



## XXIV

Let the world's sharpness like a clasping knife  
Shut in upon itself and do no harm  
In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,  
And let us hear no sound of human strife  
After the click of the shutting. Life to life—  
I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,  
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm  
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife  
Are weak to injure. Very whitely still  
The lilies of our lives may reassure  
Their blossoms from their roots, accessible  
Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer;  
Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill.  
God only, who made us rich, can make us poor.



## XXV

A heavy heart, Belovèd, have I borne  
From year to year until I saw thy face,  
And sorrow after sorrow took the place  
Of all those natural joys as lightly worn  
As the stringed pearls . . . each lifted in its turn  
By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes apace  
Were changed to long despairs, till God's own grace  
Could scarcely lift above the world forlorn  
My heavy heart. Then *thou* didst bid me bring  
And let it drop adown thy calmly great  
Deep being! Fast it sinketh, as a thing  
Which its own nature doth precipitate,  
While thine doth close above it, mediating  
Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished fate.



## XXVI

I lived with visions for my company,  
Instead of men and women, years ago,  
And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know  
A sweeter music than they played to me.  
But soon their trailing purple was not free  
Of this world's dust,—their lutes did silent grow,  
And I myself grew faint and blind below  
Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU didst come . . . to be,  
Belovèd, what they seemed. Their shining fronts,  
Their songs, their splendours, (better, yet the same,  
As river-water hallowed into fonts)  
Met in thee, and from out thee overcame  
My soul with satisfaction of all wants—  
Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.





## XXVII

My own belovèd, who hast lifted me  
From this drear flat of earth where I was thrown,  
And, in betwixt the languid ringlets, blown  
A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully  
Shines out again, as all the angels see,  
Before thy saving kiss! My own, my own,  
Who camest to me when the world was gone,  
And I who looked for only God, found *thee*!  
I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and glad.  
As one who stands in dewless asphodel,  
Looks backward on the tedious time he had  
In the upper life,—so I, with bosom-swell,  
Make witness, here, between the good and bad,  
That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves as well.



## XXVIII

My letters! all dead paper, . . . mute and white—  
And yet they seem alive and quivering  
Against my tremulous hands which loose the string  
And let them drop down on my knee to-night.  
This said, . . . he wished to have me in his sight  
Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring  
To come and touch my hand . . . a simple thing,  
Yet I wept for it!—this, . . . the paper's light . . .  
Said, *Dear, I love thee*; and I sank and quailed  
As if God's future thundered on my past.  
This said, *I am thine*—and so its ink has paled  
With lying at my heart that beat too fast.  
And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill availed,  
If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!



## XXIX

I think of thee!—my thoughts do twine and bud  
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,  
Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see  
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.  
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood  
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee  
Who art dearer, better! rather instantly  
Renew thy presence. As a strong tree should,  
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,  
And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee,  
Drop heavily down, . . burst, shattered, everywhere!  
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee  
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,  
I do not think of thee—I am too near thee.



### XXX

I see thine image through my tears to-night,  
And yet to-day I saw thee smiling. How  
Refer the cause?—Belovèd, is it thou  
Or I? who makes me sad? The acolyte  
Amid the chanted joy and thankful rite,  
May so fall flat, with pale insensate brow,  
On the altar-stair. I hear thy voice and vow  
Perplexed, uncertain, since thou art out of sight,  
As he, in his swooning ears, the choir's amen.  
Belovèd, dost thou love? or did I see all  
The glory as I dreamed, and fainted when  
Too vehement light dilated my ideal,  
For my soul's eyes? Will that light come again,  
As now these tears come . . . falling hot and real?





## X X X I

Thou comest! all is said without a word.  
I sit beneath thy looks, as children do  
In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble through  
Their happy eyelids from an unaverred  
Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold, I erred  
In that last doubt! and yet I cannot rue  
The sin most, but the occasion . . . that we two  
Should for a moment stand unministered  
By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near and close,  
Thou dovelike help! and, when my fears would rise,  
With thy broad heart serenely interpose.  
Brood down with thy divine sufficiencies  
These thoughts which tremble when bereft of those,  
Like callow birds left desert to the skies.



## XXXII

The first time that the sun rose on thine oath  
To love me, I looked forward to the moon  
To slacken all those bonds which seemed too soon  
And quickly tied to make a lasting troth.  
Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may quickly loathe;  
And, looking on myself, I seemed not one  
For such man's love!—more like an out-of-tune  
Worn viol, a good singer would be wroth  
To spoil his song with, and which, snatched in haste,  
Is laid down at the first ill-sounding note.  
I did not wrong myself so, but I placed  
A wrong on *thee*. For perfect strains may float  
'Neath master-hands, from instrument defaced,—  
And great souls, at one stroke, may do and doat.



### XXXIII

Yes, call me by my pet-name! let me hear  
The name I used to run at, when a child,  
From innocent play, and leave the cowslips piled,  
To glance up in some face that proved me dear  
With the look of its eyes. I miss the clear  
Fond voices which, being drawn and reconciled  
Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,  
Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,  
While I call God . . call God!—So let thy mouth  
Be heir to those who are now exanimate.  
Gather the north flowers to complete the south,  
And catch the early love up in the late.  
Yes, call me by that name,—and I, in truth,  
With the same heart, will answer, and not wait.



## XXXIV

With the same heart, I said, I'll answer thee  
As those, when thou shalt call me by my name—  
Lo, the vain promise! is the same, the same,  
Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy?  
When called before, I told how hastily  
I dropped my flowers or brake off from a game,  
To run and answer with the smile that came  
At play last moment, and went on with me  
Through my obedience. When I answer now,  
I drop a grave thought,—break from solitude;—  
Yet still my heart goes to thee . . . ponder how . .  
Not as to a single good, but all my good!  
Lay thy hand on it, best one, and allow  
That no child's foot could run fast as this blood.





## X X X V

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange  
And be all to me? Shall I never miss  
Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss  
That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,  
When I look up, to drop on a new range  
Of walls and floors . . . another home than this?  
Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is  
Filled by dead eyes too tender to know change?  
That's hardest. If to conquer love, has tried,  
To conquer grief, tries more . . . as all things prove;  
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.  
Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love.  
Yet love me—wilt thou? Open thine heart wide,  
And fold within, the wet wings of thy dove.



## XXXVI

When we met first and loved, I did not build  
Upon the event with marble. Could it mean  
To last, a love set pendulous between  
Sorrow and sorrow? Nay, I rather thrilled,  
Distrusting every light that seemed to gild  
The onward path, and feared to overlean  
A finger even. And, though I have grown serene  
And strong since then, I think that God has willed  
A still renewable fear . . . O love, O troth . . .  
Lest these enclaspèd hands should never hold,  
This mutual kiss drop down between us both  
As an unowned thing, once the lips being cold.  
And Love, be false! if *he*, to keep one oath,  
Must lose one joy, by his life's star foretold.



## XXXVII

Pardon, oh, pardon, that my soul should make  
Of all that strong divineness which I know  
For thine and thee, an image only so  
Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and break.  
It is that distant years which did not take  
Thy sovranity, recoiling with a blow,  
Have forced my swimming brain to undergo  
Their doubt and dread, and blindly to forsake  
Thy purity of likeness, and distort  
Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit.  
As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,  
His guardian sea-god to commemorate,  
Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills a-snort,  
And vibrant tail, within the temple-gate.



## XXXVIII

First time he kissed me, he but only kissed  
The fingers of this hand wherewith I write;  
And, ever since, it grew more clean and white, . .  
Slow to world-greetings . . quick with its 'Oh, list,'  
When the angels speak. A ring of amethyst  
I could not wear here, plainer to my sight,  
Than that first kiss. The second passed in height  
The first, and sought the forehead, and half missed,  
Half falling on the hair. O beyond meed!  
That was the chrism of love, which love's own crown,  
With sanctifying sweetness, did precede.  
The third upon my lips was folded down  
In perfect, purple state; since when, indeed,  
I have been proud and said, 'My love, my own.'





## XXXIX

Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace  
To look through and behind this mask of me,  
(Against which years have beat thus blanchingly  
With their rains), and behold my soul's true face,  
The dim and weary witness of life's race!—  
Because thou hast the faith and love to see,  
Through that same soul's distracting lethargy,  
The patient angel waiting for a place  
In the new heavens!—because nor sin nor woe,  
Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighbourhood,  
Nor all which others viewing, turn to go, . .  
Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-viewed, . .  
Nothing repels thee, . . Dearest, teach me so  
To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good.



## X L

Oh, yes! they love through all this world of ours!  
I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth.  
I have heard love talked in my early youth,  
And since, not so long back but that the flowers  
Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans and Giaours  
Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no ruth  
For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth  
Slips on the nut, if, after frequent showers,  
The shell is over-smooth,—and not so much  
Will turn the thing called love, aside to hate,  
Or else to oblivion. But thou art not such  
A lover, my Belovèd! thou canst wait  
Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls to touch,  
And think it soon when others cry 'Too late.'



## X L I

I thank all who have loved me in their hearts,  
With thanks and love from mine. Deep thanks to all  
Who paused a little near the prison-wall,  
To hear my music in its louder parts,  
Ere they went onward, each one to the mart's  
Or temple's occupation, beyond call.  
But thou, who, in my voice's sink and fall,  
When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's  
Own instrument didst drop down at thy foot,  
To hearken what I said between my tears, . .  
Instruct me how to thank thee!—Oh, to shoot  
My soul's full meaning into future years,  
That *they* should lend it utterance, and salute  
Love that endures, from Life that disappears!



## XLII\*

*'My future will not copy fair my past'—*  
I wrote that once; and thinking at my side  
My ministering life-angel justified  
The word by his appealing look upcast  
To the white throne of God, I turned at last,  
And there, instead, saw thee, not unallied  
To angels in thy soul! Then I, long tried  
By natural ills, received the comfort fast,  
While budding, at thy sight, my pilgrim's staff  
Gave out green leaves with morning dew's impearled.  
I seek no copy now of life's first half:  
Leave here the pages with long musing curled,  
And write me new my future's epigraph,  
New angel mine, unhop'd for in the world!

\* This sonnet, originally called FUTURE AND PAST, was not included in the series in the earlier editions. See Note on the text, page 107.





### XLIII

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.  
I love thee to the level of everyday's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.



## XLIV

Belovèd, thou hast brought me many flowers  
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through  
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew  
In this close room, nor missed the sun and showers.  
So, in the like name of that love of ours,  
Take back these thoughts which here unfolded too,  
And which on warm and cold days I withdrew  
From my heart's ground. Indeed, those beds and  
bowers

Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,  
And wait thy weeding; yet here's eglantine,  
Here's ivy!—take them, as I used to do  
Thy flowers, and keep them where they shall not pine.  
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colours true,  
And tell thy soul, their roots are left in mine.





## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The present text is reprinted from that of the fourth edition of **POEMS BY ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING** published in 1856. This was the last edition published in the author's lifetime, and it contains her final revisions; the sonnet now numbered XLII was included in the series for the first time. The history of the previous editions is as follows. The first was privately printed, with the title-page **SONNETS./ BY/ E. A. B./ READING : / [NOT FOR PUBLICATION] [rule] 1847**. There is no copy of this very rare volume in the British Museum or in the Bodleian Library, but a facsimile of the title-page is given in T. J. Wise's *Bibliography of the Writings . . . of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. In this and in all subsequent editions until that of 1856 the series consists of 43 sonnets only. The first edition of **POEMS / BY / ELIZABETH BARRETT /** was published by Edward Moxon in 1844. It contains one sonnet, **PAST AND FUTURE**, which is referred to in the

SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE and is not being reprinted in the present edition. The second edition of POEMS / BY / ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING / was published in 1850 by Chapman and Hall. It contains the first public issue of the 43 sonnets, here first called SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE, and also the present number XLII which was printed apart from the series, with the title FUTURE AND PAST. The third edition of POEMS was published in 1853 and has the following 'Postscript', dated from Florence: 'In the present edition the author has done her best to remedy the oversights and defects of that former revision [1850] which her absence from England rendered less complete than it should have been. This revision did not greatly affect the SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE. A few alterations were made, but the more important variations were not included until the next edition. In the fourth edition of the POEMS, published in 1856, the SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE appeared for the first time in their present

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form. FUTURE AND PAST was added to the series as No. XLII, without other title, bringing the total number of the sonnets to 44; and various alterations were made from the text of the first public issue of 1850, the more interesting of which are recorded below.

SONNET XI. l. 7

To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale	1856
. . . the woodland nightingale	1850

SONNET XII. l. 13

And that I love (O soul, we must be meek!)	1856
. . . I must be meek!)	1850

SONNET XIV. l. 11

A creature might forget to weep, who bore	1856
Since one might well forget to weep, who bore	1850

SONNET XV. l. 7

Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's divine	1856
For sorrow . . .	1850

SONNET XVI. ll. 9-12

And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword	
To one who lifts him from the bloody earth,—	
Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,	
Here ends my strife.	1856

And, as a soldier struck down by a sword  
 May cry, 'My strife ends here,' and sink to earth,  
 Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,  
 Here ends my doubt. 1850

SONNET XXXVII. l. 10

. . . distort  
 Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit. 1856  
 . . . with worthless counterfeit: 1850

SONNET XXXIX. l. 3

(Against which years have beat thus blanchingly 1856  
 . . . blenchingly 1850

SONNET XXXIX. l. 8

The patient angel waiting for a place 1856  
 . . . his place 1850

SONNET XLI. l. 14

. . . salute  
 Love that endures, from Life that disappears! 1856  
 . . . with Life that disappears! 1850

SONNET XLII. l. 6

And there, instead, saw thee, not unallied 1856  
 And saw instead there, *thee*; not unallied 1850













